Like A Cruel Angel: (Mis)Translation & Perverse Heterosexuality in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

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Translation serves as a bridge, granting audiences access to unique worldviews, diverse cultures, and new narratives that would otherwise remain inaccessible. From *The Little Prince* to *Parasite*, translation has unlocked doors for American audiences to engage with stories that have since become iconic in global media. Despite its complexities, the translation and localization process has created essential pathways for cross-cultural understanding. In the realm of anime, translation has been indispensable in sharing Japanese animated narratives with a broader audience, enabling the global consumption of seminal works like *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

In one of the final episodes of the hit anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the main character, Shinji Ikari, finally receives a profession of love. After quickly bonding with the mysterious Kaworu Nagisa in a short period of time, Kaworu admits that he loves Shinji. While reflecting on this, Shinji thinks to himself, "Kaworu said that he loved me. It was the first time someone told me they loved me" ("The Beginning and the End, or 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door'" 23:32)[1]. It's a vulnerable moment between the two, particularly because Shinji and Kaworu are both young boys. However, this moment would be significantly altered when the show would be re-translated in 2019 for Netflix. Kaworu's profession of love is gone, the queer subtext between the two is erased, and all Shinji would realize is that he was "worthy of his grace" ("The Beginning and the End" 23:32)[2].

Created by Hideaki Anno and released in 1995, *Evangelion* explores a futuristic version of Tokyo in which the city is being terrorized by giant, monster-like figures called Angels. Shinji, who is pressured by his father, must pilot his own mech, a science fiction term for pilotable robots, in order to protect Tokyo. While the anime looks like nothing more than a show a part of the mecha genre, the show grapples with the concepts of identity, relationships, and

[1] Gainax, 1996.
[2] Netflix, 2019.

sexuality. Shinji's relationship with women and girls is riddled with acts of intimacy and desire, often manifesting in traditionally unacceptable ways, such as Shinji kissing an older woman as she promises they'll continue this later. In comparison, his relationship with Kaworu is much more innocent. By presenting heterosexuality as something more often perverse than not, *Evangelion* subverts how it is typically presented in comparison to queerness. Despite this subversion, Shinji's relationship with Kaworu is the one that ends up altered, and therefore censored. I will continue to use the word "perverse" throughout this work, but I want to emphasize that the way heterosexuality is presented in this franchise is both perverse *and* pervasive, as shown through examples that will be analyzed later.

The heterosexual relationships central to my research involve Shinji's interactions with Misato Katsuragi, Asuka Langley Soryu, Rei Ayanami, and Mari Makinami. Notably, Rei, Asuka, and Mari are also Evangelion pilots. Despite the significant age difference between Shinji and both Misato and Mari, these characters engage in sexual or romantic acts with him. Moreover, perverse examples of heterosexuality are not confined to these instances; the *Evangelion* franchise features numerous examples of taboo heterosexual relationships, such as the one between Shinji's father and a clone of his deceased wife. By closely examining and analyzing Shinji's relationships with these female characters and contrasting them with his relationship with Kaworu, I aim to illuminate the stark differences in Anno's portrayal of heterosexual and homosexual relationships. This analysis will also demonstrate the inadequacies of Netflix's translation in accurately conveying the Evangelion narrative. This translation, done by translator Dan Kanemitsu, has proven to be inaccurate through the lens of translation theory. Additionally, I will explore the reasoning behind, and the consequences of, such mistranslations.

It is important to recognize the multiple components of the *Evangelion* franchise. The original anime series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, culminates with the film *The End of Evangelion* (1997). In 2007, Anno began releasing the *Rebuild of Evangelion* series, consisting of four films that served as the true ending for the franchise. Analyzing the show along with each movie provides essential insights into Shinji's relationships, their portrayals, and their broader implications. By bridging scholarly conversations involving *Evangelion*, queer theory, and translation theory, my analysis seeks to initiate a new dialogue within academia while uniting scholars from related fields. This integrative approach is crucial to achieving my research objectives and contributing to the broader academic discourse.

The removal of Shinji's romantic relationship with Kaworu follows a problematic trend where when anime is translated into English, queer subtext, or even explicit relationships, are entirely ignored. Growing up, I became fascinated with anime after watching an episode of *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997) on VHS. The show featured two girls who were cousins and *uncomfortably* close with each other. It wouldn't be until years later that I would find out that the two were explicitly dating if you watched it in Japanese, but the English version referred to them as cousins who appear to really enjoy each other's company. This was just one of the many changes that would be made when it was translated into English in order to censor queer identities for American audiences. *Sailor Moon* had the potential to widely portray queer love to its young, primarily female audience. Instead, the show was stripped of any and all of its queer representation with no way to view it if you didn't understand Japanese.

Evangelion, similarly to *Sailor Moon*, provides a raw and complicated portrayal of queer identity. By opting to remove this relationship, the series inadvertently decides that queerness is something that can and should be hidden. There are queer people in real life watching

Evangelion, and it's harmful to send the message that their identity shouldn't be shared. This is worsened when we consider how innocent queerness is portrayed in the series in comparison to how perverse heterosexuality is. Despite this perversion, it is seemingly more acceptable than queerness simply because it's between a man and a woman. Queer people deserve to see themselves portrayed in media, and it's especially unfair to remove those portrayals after the fact. In addition to being harmful, the removal of Shinji's relationship with Kaworu erases a key aspect of the show. *Evangelion*'s story relies on Shinji's relationships with others, particularly the lack of love and care he feels within them. While Kaworu is only briefly featured in comparison to some of the other characters he has a relationship with, Shinji would not be who he is without Kaworu and his love. Relationships sit at the center of *Evangelion*, and the removal of this one has consequences for its audience.

Background & Context

Before creating *Evangelion*, Anno gained notoriety from his work on Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Despite being expelled from his arts university and never finishing his degree, Miyazaki was desperate for animators and was instantly impressed with Anno's work. This allowed for Anno to co-found Gainax, an anime studio that would eventually be responsible for several critically acclaimed shows, a few months after *Nausicaä*'s release. At Gainax, Anno would go on to work with Miyazaki again in 1990 when the two created *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* together. However, *Nadia* would not be a success for Gainax, or Anno, whatsoever. After the show finished airing in 1991, Gainax had lost 80 million yen and didn't even own the rights to the show. In addition to this, Anno fell into a deep depression once the show ended. Citing the destructive creative process for the reason behind his depression, it would take years for him to begin working in the anime industry again until a night

of drinking where he agreed to take on a time slot that he could do anything with. He began working on a new show, which would later be known as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. In a statement published before the release of the show, Anno wrote, "I tried to include everything of myself in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*—myself, a broken man who could do nothing for four years. A man who ran away for four years, one who was simply not dead. Then one thought. 'You can't run away,' came to me, and I restarted this production. It is a production where my only thought was to burn my feelings into film" (Anno 230). Not only would *Evangelion* change Anno's life, the show would fundamentally impact Japanese pop culture forever.

The franchise paved the way for many anime that would come after, leaving a lasting influence on shows like *Serial Experiments Lain* and *RahXephon*. In addition to this, the show has been continuously referenced in American pop culture as well, ranging from media like *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* to *Nope*. *Evangelion* as a franchise has grown drastically ever since its release as a television show. The show only aired for a few months from 1995 to 1996, ending after a 26-episode run. The show is centered around 14-year-old boy Shinji Ikari. Set fifteen years after a catastrophic event known as the Second Impact that left billions dead, Shinji is instructed by his estranged father Gendo, the director of a military force called NERV, to pilot a biomechanical mecha called an Evangelion. Shinji must pilot his Evangelion to fight Angels in order to prevent the Third Impact. Over the course of the show, Shinji is introduced to two other pilots, Rei Ayanami and Asuka Langley Soryu, both of whom Shinji develops unique relationships with. While the series is filled with action, it has redefined the mecha genre as *Evangelion* explores themes such as mental illness, responsibility, self-worth, love, and the purpose of human existence. Looking at Shinji's relationships specifically, they are dense with these themes and make the character who he is.

The show was met with critical acclaim while it aired up until the airing of the final two episodes. The ending of the show provided no straightforward conclusion, prompting fans to criticize the finale due to how abstract it was. The public outcry caused Anno to develop *The End of Evangelion* (1997), a movie that would serve as a new ending for the show. *The End of Evangelion* is a replacement for episodes 25 and 26 of the series, giving the franchise a more coherent, albeit still not entirely straightforward, ending. The film was both a critical and financial success, with the film earning billions of yen and hundreds of thousands of viewers in just a few days. Today, *The End of Evangelion* is largely considered one of the greatest animated films of all time. Despite its success, it did not stop Anno from releasing *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone* in 2007. This single film would grow into a 4-film series spanning almost 14 years. This series initially followed the same plot of the show, but evolved into something more with new plot lines, characters, and an entirely different ending than the two that came before it. Notably, this film series introduces a new Evangelion pilot, Mari Makinami. This film series, referred to as *Rebuild of Evangelion*, serves as the true ending for the *Evangelion* franchise. While the show and *The End of Evangelion* were retranslated for Netflix, the *Rebuild* films were released through Amazon Prime Video. However, each translation was done by Kanemitsu despite the platform change.

While the show, *The End of Evangelion*, and *Rebuild of Evangelion* have variance in each individual story, some storylines are consistent throughout each form of the franchise. One of these consistencies is the character of Kaworu Nagisa, who is a teenage boy meant to be a replacement pilot for one of the Evangelions. In episode 24 of the show, Shinji meets Kaworu and the two grow close very quickly. The relationship between the two is unlike any of the ones he had before, and Shinji is grateful to have felt loved for the first time in his life. At the end of

the episode, it is revealed that Kaworu is not a human, but is actually an Angel. Because of this, Shinji must kill Kaworu in order to save himself and the world from complete destruction. Shinji is hesitant to go through with this, but he decides to do so for the greater good. But in a romantic moment a few scenes before Kaworu's death, Kaworu tells Shinji that he loves him. Shinji reacts to this confession stating, "Kaworu said that he loved me. It was the first time someone told me they loved me" ("The Beginning and the End" 23:32)[3]. As previously stated, this monumental moment in Shinji's life would later be edited after Netflix released a new translation of the show in 2019 with any reference to love between the two removed. This edit entirely censors a piece of queer representation, which is made even worse by the fact that the Netflix version left perverse representations of heterosexuality uncensored.

The change was immediately met with backlash from fans online who watched the new version. One fan posted online, "yeah, like I'm genuinely upset?? Kaworu and Shinji's relationship was so important to me growing up and seeing it downplayed like this is frustrating" (@jimmygnome9). Despite this, the main translator for Netflix's version of *Evangelion*, Dan Kanemitsu, would go on to defend this change. On social media site X he posted, "It is one thing for characters to confess their love. It is quite another for the audience to infer affection and leave them guessing. How committed are the characters? What possible misunderstandings might be talking [sic] place? Leaving room for interpretation make [sic] things exciting" (@dankanemitsu). This response would create even more backlash, citing that this mistranslation entirely shifts the weight of the relationship between Shinji and Kaworu.

I will examine *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *The End of Evangelion*, and *Rebuild of Evangelion* to explore Anno's portrayal of heterosexuality and his use of intimacy in these depictions. These three elements of the franchise are essential to my analysis. The show's

[3] Gainax, 1996.

mistranslation and the initial introduction of Kaworu in the franchise are particularly significant. In addition to this, *The End of Evangelion* is essential due to how it presents some of the most striking examples of perverse heterosexuality, while the *Rebuild of Evangelion* films offer an extended exploration of Shinji's relationships. By closely analyzing Shinji's relationships with female characters and comparing them to his relationship with Kaworu, I aim to highlight the double standards in these portrayals. Furthermore, I will illuminate the longstanding history of censorship and translation issues in anime. The removal of the romantic aspect of Shinji and Kaworu's relationship is not merely a censorship issue; it also undermines the viewing experience of the series.

Evangelion itself has been studied by scholars extensively when it comes to the themes of identity, self, and genre fusion. Perhaps one of the most notable examples of this is Susan J. Napier's work for *Science Fiction Studies*. On these topics, she explains that the action with the Evangelion pilots and the Angels is prominent, but it's only a small piece of the show. Instead, the individual characters, their identities, and their mental health are primary pieces of the story. She writes:

> The other strand of the narrative is far more complex and provocative, as it becomes increasingly concerned with the problematic mental and emotional states of the main characters, all of whom carry deep psychic wounds and whose psychic turmoil is represented against an increasingly frenzied apocalyptic background in which it becomes clear that the threat from the Angels is matched by the machinations of various humans connected with NERV. (Napier 425)

In addition to this, academics have generally examined how translation and localization often lead to censorship in anime, particularly with regard to queerness. Scholars with

backgrounds in translation studies have continuously identified this issue across decades. Writing for *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, Rhea Ashley Hoskin discusses the impact censorship on queer media has. On a lesbian couple that was censored in translation from *Sailor Moon* specifically, she writes, "The relationship between Amara and Michelle exemplify how the Westernization of *Sailor Moon* works to maintain heteronormativity and normative-bodies by erasing queer desire and identities" (Hoskin 81). Although few have specifically examined the mistranslation and censorship of *Evangelion* in an academic context, this does not diminish its legitimacy. I aim to bridge the gap between scholarly discussions on censorship in anime and the discourse on identity in *Evangelion*.

Literature Review

An analysis of Shinji's relationships with the women and girls around him (specifically Misato Katsuragi, Asuka Langley Soryu, Rei Ayanami, and Mari Makinami) will reveal patterns in the representation of romantic and sexual intimacy, particularly how these relationships often portray pedophilia, abuse, and unhealthy dynamics. These relationships, in comparison to Shinji's one with Kaworu, will emphasize how contrastive heterosexuality is portrayed, therefore emphasizing how jarring the alteration of Kaworu's love confession is. The differences between the heterosexual versus queer relationship in *Evangelion* show audiences that inappropriate portrayals of heterosexuality are acceptable for audiences, but a more innocent love is too far merely because it's between two boys. The original translation of *Evangelion* included a weighted, queer relationship between Shinji and Kaworu. Gainax's version of the relationship was arguably subtextually queer, but the Netflix translation of Kaworu's love confession entirely alters the weight of their relationship while also removing a piece of queer representation. While *Evangelion* is an anime filled with action, the relationships in it are crucial to understanding the

characters and their values. Because of how dense with content *Evangelion* is, and its ability to blend genres, scholars have studied the franchise since the early 2000's. There is little academic research on *Evangelion*, mistranslation, and the censorship of queerness specifically. While this research is not completely nonexistent, the specific topic for this work has been largely ignored in academia. However, we can look at researchers who individually study subjects like *Evangelion*, sexuality, and translation theory and apply their theories to my own.

As previously noted, Napier's article "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in 'Neon Genesis Evangelion' and 'Serial Experiments Lain'" is one of the most notable pieces of research on the show as well as one of the earliest. Published in 2002, Napier describes *Evangelion* as one of the most important anime to ever exist. While Napier believes it would be a disservice to attempt to summarize the entire show, she explains that the narrative is extremely intricate and what makes it so unique is the internal struggles that the characters are dealing with. In addition to this, she notes that interrogation is a clear theme throughout the show, but it's a form of internal struggle. For example, Shinji identifies questions within himself, but also finds the answers to these questions within himself. Despite this, Shinji's world is dominated by technology as opposed to human connection. By the end of the show, Napier argues, the show explores what happens to humanity when it is finally removed from technology.

After the publication of Napier's article, there were few articles being published that solely studied *Evangelion*, especially in regards to the themes of the show. There are, of course, exceptions to this, but *Evangelion* wouldn't rise in popularity in academia until the 2010's. In 2012, Christy Gibbs published her PhD thesis *Breaking Binaries: Transgressing Sexualities in Japanese Animation*. In this thesis Gibbs intends to closely analyze how sexuality is represented

in anime aimed at teenagers and adults as well as how these representations impact the narrative. In addition to this, she contextualizes the representation of sexuality within Japanese culture. She pulls from theorists like Robin George Collingwood and Judith Butler in order to describe how sexuality and gender performance tend to be linked. However, Gibbs doesn't want to examine anime through one specific lens, but instead to examine and observe anime characters through different theories. She acknowledges that anime occasionally portrays sexuality through unconventional or even disturbing means, but she wants to identify how these ideas are brought to life. This thesis is dense with content (with over 400 pages), and isn't entirely about *Evangelion*. However, she dedicates a chapter to examining the representation of sexuality in the show. She references the portrayals of sexuality as intentionally Freudian in nature, which is something other scholars have noted, but she wants to take it a step further by analyzing how this affects the personalities of the characters. She explains that the show doesn't follow genre conventions or the stereotypes expected of the characters. The show is rife with psychological problems among the characters, which occasionally manifests through sex. Gibbs explains that the characters are unfulfilled sexually and emotionally, which leads to them indulging in shallow, toxic, or even abusive relationships in an attempt to find fulfillment (ex. Rei's relationship with Gendo, Shinji's relationship with Misato, Asuka's relationship with Kaji, etc.). She describes these relationships as the crux of *Evangelion*, and goes on to describe how sexuality is presented in perverse ways throughout the show, such as one character engaging in a sexual relationship with the same man her mother had one with as well.

In 2013, Carl Li, Mari Nakamura, and Martin Roth wrote "Japanese Science Fiction in Converging Media: Alienation and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*." These three researchers investigated how the concept of alienation was used in the *Evangelion* show, manga, and video

game. They explain that alienation may refer to separation, but it also has a history within Marxism. Karl Marx believed that alienation was a result of capitalism, leading to alienation from product, the act of production, other workers, and from their "species-being" (Li et al. 1). "Species-being" refers to how humans distinguish themselves from animals. The researchers go on to explain that all forms of alienation lead to isolation and self-estrangement. In *Evangelion* specifically, alienation is rampant throughout, and these researchers intend to describe what this isolation reveals about the politics of the show. Li et al. first explains the premise of the show as well as the release order of various pieces of content from the franchise (like the manga and games). They continue to explain how isolated Shinji is, often because he pushes the people around him away because he fears getting hurt. Shinji's inner struggle is difficult for him throughout the show and is only furthered by his own feelings of helplessness. Li et al. uses the example of Shinji having to kill Kaworu in order to save humanity as an example of this. However, he tries to move away from alienation by piloting the Evangelion. Li et al. explains that *Evangelion* proves that alienation isn't always manifested, but sometimes exists because of how we interact with others socially.

The following year researcher Katherine Savoy would publish her article "The Artificial Restoration of Agency through Sex and Technology in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*" for the *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* where she focuses on relationships and sexuality in *Evangelion*. She explains that the show is interesting in that women often are powerful, resourceful, and smart. However, *Evangelion* often uses overtly sexual displays of these women. Savoy argues that the appearance of women is tied to a loss of control over their identity. By portraying women in a sexualized manner, the show embraces the male gaze. Because of this, the women in the show are desired but also devalued. Savoy also notes that the

sexualization of women in the show is sometimes played for jokes, but other times is portrayed as something serious that affects the mental health of each woman. She goes on to describe how Misato Katsuragi uses her sexuality, often manifesting in ways that are difficult to watch. Sexuality is one of the strongest themes in *Evangelion*, particularly the act of it being forced upon someone. In another section of the article, Savoy characterizes Shinji's relationship with Kaworu. It's the first time Shinji is in a loving relationship and the first time he allows himself to be comfortable with someone else. Despite this, she describes how Shinji denies sexuality throughout the show, even when it comes to Kaworu. Notably, she argues that Shinji killing Kaworu is an act of denying the concept of sexuality. Savoy also describes how the show features conventionally inappropriate relationships throughout, like Asuka's attempts to seduce a man much older than her. This article describes how sexuality manifests throughout the show, particularly with the women of the show.

In 2021, José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Ana Soler-Baena compiled several articles on *Evangelion* for their book *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*. One of the final chapters is "Creating Happy Endings: Yaoi Fanworks as Audience Response to Kaworu and Shinji's Relationship", written by Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto. She seeks to examine how fans of *Evangelion*, particularly those interested in the romantic relationship between Shinji and Kaworu, have responded to the relationship in online communities after the airing of the show. She is particularly interested in yaoi fans (also occasionally referred to as fujoshi) which refers to fans who interpret and respond to relationships between boys in anime. Fujoshi will look for proof of the relationship, but the evidence may occasionally be implicit or even falsified as opposed to obvious proof. Bauwens-Sugimoto first wants to identify what the legitimate proof of Shinji and Kaworu's

relationship is. She explains that this relationship is often regarded as open to interpretation, but the series sometimes suggests that it is romantic instead of platonic. In addition to this, she explains that fans are hesitant to create fan content of Shinji and Kaworu because they are both young teenagers (or in Kaworu's case presents as one). Kaworu being an Angel instead of a human also poses an issue as it's not clear if his idea of love would be the same as Shinji's. However, the story being vague is what allows fans to expand the content. Bauwens-Sugimoto explains that fans don't alter the story as a means of disrespect, but instead as a way to show love for the characters. She examined several fan websites (fanfiction.net, fan-made translation sites, and Pixiv) to see how fans have responded or altered the relationship. Across the board, fans have moved away from subtext and opted to make the relationship more obviously queer. Her analysis of fan content showcases the yearning fans feel for something more between the two boys. Bauwens-Sugimoto acknowledges that even the original ending where Kaworu sacrifices himself can be interpreted as an idealized romance.

The final chapter of the book is titled "Plot Summary of Neon Genesis Evangelion and Analysis of Character Interrelations." The chapter, written by Tatiana Lameiro-González, begins with a summary of the show. Lameiro-González explains what the Second Impact was, an event that led to the death of half of the population in an attempt to research the Angels. After the Second Impact, the United Nations has a private organization working towards fighting the Angels and protecting the world. Lameiro-González explains that the show has two intertwined plotlines: one about fighting the Angels and one about the mental state of the characters. She goes on to say that the plot about the Angels becomes less important as the show progresses, and instead it focuses on the characters' search for identity. The ending of the show is vague, and confusing to many, leading to it having multiple possibilities for what it was supposed to mean.

Lameiro-González then describes the characters themselves, beginning with Shinji. He struggles to deal with his past traumas, leading him to be overly sensitive and self conscious. He wants nothing more than approval of others, but he fears that getting too close with someone will only hurt him. Rei, another Evangelion pilot, has a mysterious background in the beginning of the show. However, it's revealed that she's actually one of many clones created of Shinji's mother. Asuka is another pilot who also craves approval and struggles with trauma, but it manifests in different ways than Shinji. In fact, their personalities are opposites. Lameiro-González describes some of the side characters as well, like Ritsuko Akagi, Ryōji Kaji and Tōji Suzuhara. The way the characters are connected can be confusing, but Lameiro-González creates a chart to make it easier to understand (see fig. 1). In addition to this, she explains what led to the creation of the movies as well as the manga.

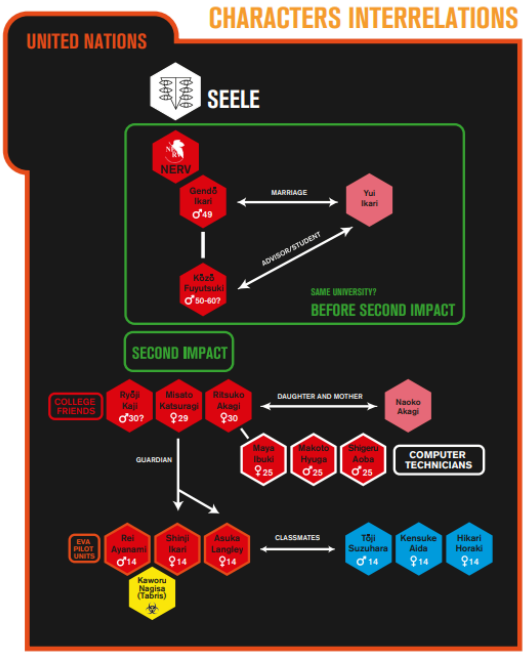

Fig. 1. A chart of character interrelations in Evangelion. "Plot Summary of Neon Genesis Evangelion and Analysis of Character Interrelations", *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 2021.

In their essay "The Desperate Search for Meaning in Life", published in 2022, researchers Heather Browning and Walter Veit wrote about how relationships and communication are what matters most to characters like Shinji, as opposed to something like piloting the Evangelions to keep their city safe. Instead of finding meaning in their work, the Evangelion pilots care about getting attention from others, which is why they agree to be pilots. Despite finding meaning in their connections with others, the characters still struggle to form them with the people around them. These researchers emphasize how central human connection is to each character's motives and goals. This is probably most true for Shinji. Shinji's connection with Misato is the one that makes him feel comfortable and accepted at home, eventually leading her to push him to make his own decisions. Rei's relationship with Shinji grows to be so strong that she ends up choosing to support Shinji over Gendo, the man who is the reason for her existence. In addition to this, Asuka is the only one who is physically by Shinji's side at the end of *The End of Evangelion*. While Browning and Veit feel that Shinji's relationships with Asuka and Rei are often conflicting, they also believe that these characters truly care about each other. One of the most defining relationships in Shinji's life, they argue, is his one with Kaworu. He teaches Shinji that he must consider his place in the world before later telling him that he loves him. Kaworu's love changes Shinji, eventually leading to Shinji becoming more confident in himself and his actions. By the end of their article, Browning and Veit argue that Shinji's relationships are what ultimately saves humanity by the end of the series.

Perhaps one of the only academic works on *Evangelion* and mistranslation is Nicholas Iadeluca's essay "Lost in Interpretation: An Analysis of Subjectivity in Translation." Iadeluca describes how important the translation industry is as it allows viewers to consume media without the barrier of a language difference. He goes on to explain that translators work as a

middleman between the creators and the viewers. Most of the time this process works effectively in order to create a faithful translation. However, Iadeluca argues that the 2019 Netflix translation of *Evangelion* is a prominent example of how the translation process doesn't always get it right. Iadeluca looks at *Evangelion* as an example of the translation process not meeting expectations in regards to its portrayal of queerness specifically. He goes on to describe how the translation process is often misunderstood by fans. Fans sometimes demand a direct, 1:1 translation, but that doesn't always maintain the original intention. Sometimes words won't have a direct translation in English, or it ruins the sentence structure. He describes translation as a means of interpreting instead of translating. This interpretation occasionally requires localization, especially with media that has distinct ties to cultures outside of the ones in the United States. Iadeluca explains that interpretation comes with a lot of nuance in order to get it right. However, the interpretation aspect can cause issues due to the fact translators may not interpret things the same way. Iadeluca notes the backlash to the Netflix translation of *Evangelion*, and points to the manga as proof that the relationship is meant to be interpreted as romantic. He also explains that this mistranslation inserts ambiguity into something explicitly queer as well as undermines Shinji's character and his trauma.

Anime, particularly the translation process that comes with it, has been studied by scholars extensively. The act of mistranslation as a means of censorship is a longstanding phenomenon in anime, something that has been noticed in academia. In her thesis, *Peeling Back the Candy-Colored Wrapper*, Rachel Smith closely examines three anime shows from the magical girl genre and how queerness is used in them. The first chapter focuses on an explanation of anime and magical girls. She contextualizes where anime and manga comes from as well as explains that they're not the same as American cartoons and comic books/graphic

novels. Instead, they have unique styles and have their own storytelling techniques in comparison to their American counterparts. Smith explains that the magical girl genre, a subgenre of "shoujo", is one of the most recognizable genres in anime. The magical girl genre is characterized by its inclusion of magical, powerful girls and women who embrace what it means to be traditionally feminine. Smith is studying the magical girl shows *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. In *Madoka Magica*, the romance between female characters is subtextual. However, some of the characters, including the titular Madoka herself, are generally agreed upon to be queer. Smith closely analyzes the relationship between the girls in the show and the manga, with some being more explicitly queer than others. She explains how *Madoka Magic*a primarily portrays these relationships as a joke, but there are instances where they're taken more seriously. Looking at *Cardcaptor Sakura*, Smith explains that the American version of the show is largely different from the original. In an attempt to localize it for American audiences, *Cardcaptor Sakura* was altered to appeal more to boys, therefore removing its femininity. In *Sailor Moon*, the show featured several examples of obvious queer relationships. Notably, two of the sailor guardians are in a relationship with each other. However, localization for American audiences entirely removed these romantic relationships either by editing them or entirely changing the gender of characters to make them heterosexual. Smith is one of many scholars who have noted how difficult the anime translation process is. Researchers Rhea Ashley Hoskin, Daniel Josephy-Hernández, and N.G. Rumak are just a few of many who have all written about the complicated translation process when it comes to anime.

Queer theory, particularly when it comes to compulsory heterosexuality, will be crucial in understanding that the Netflix translation of *Evangelion* is an inaccurate one. In her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", Adrienne Rich states she is concerned

with how women must hide their relationships with other women. In this essay, which popularized the term compulsory heterosexuality, Rich argues that heterosexuality is not natural, but is instead a means of upholding the patriarchy and keeping women in a position of subordination. Later, Rich goes on to list ways in which society promotes heterosexuality in order to make women feel like they have no other choice besides attraction to men, such as the erasure of lesbian representation in media. While Rich's essay is exclusively concerned with the lesbian experience, the invalidation and erasure of queer identity itself is not unique to the lesbian identity. Researchers Paul Flowers and Katie Buston noted this experience among gay men in their article for the *Journal of Adolescence*. They wrote that men feel their queer desires must also remain hidden from the people around them.

The censorship in *Evangelion*, whether intentional or not, promotes compulsory heterosexuality in the show and in the lives of its audience. By drawing from Rich's work, along with that of other scholars who have noted this phenomenon among men, it will be evident that *Evangelion* presents heterosexuality as the norm, creating a damaging impact on how queerness is viewed. Just as Rich states, the erasure of queer existence is a way to reject it all together. The decision to include a moment of unconditional love is monumental, and the decision to make this confession from another boy even more so. Understanding the concept of compulsory heterosexuality is crucial to this topic, and Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" will be essential in describing the consequences of censorship like the one in *Evangelion*.

A large part of my analysis will be the relationships Shinji has with the women and girls around him. These characters include Misato Katsuragi, Asuka Langley Soryu, Rei Ayanami, and Mari Makinami. I intend to do so by noting patterns in the representation of romantic and

sexual intimacy, particularly how these relationships are often problematic because of it. In addition to this, I will point to examples of perverse heterosexuality that may not be exclusive to Shinji's relationships. My capstone will include a comparison between heterosexual relationships and the queer one between Shinji and Kaworu as a means of emphasizing how different these portrayals are. The difference in these portrayals is important because it will also emphasize how jarring the censorship of a queer relationship is. The differences between the heterosexual versus queer relationship in *Evangelion* show audiences that inappropriate portrayals of heterosexuality are acceptable for audiences, but an innocent love is too far just because it's between two boys. In addition to this, I will point to scholarship on the anime translation process as a means of proving Netflix's translation as unsuccessful.

Analysis

In the third episode of *Evangelion*, Ritsuko Akagi, the chief scientist at NERV, explains the Hedgehog's Dilemma to Misato. She states, "Hedgehogs have a hard time sharing warmth with other hedgehogs. The closer they get, the more they hurt each other with their quills. People are also like that. I think some part of Shinji is afraid to take that risk because he's afraid of being hurt" ("A Transfer" 4:50). While Shinji initially withdraws from others due to fear, his interpersonal relationships are the core of the narrative. Despite his tendency toward self-isolation, he forges profound connections, notably with Misato, Asuka, Rei, Mari, and Kaworu throughout the franchise. However, the portrayal of his relationships with the female characters often emphasizes sexual intimacy, whereas his relationship with Kaworu is much more innocent and centers around more romance than sexuality. This distinction between heterosexual relationships and the queer relationship is significant, particularly in how Shinji's feelings for Kaworu were altered when the word "love" was removed from it. Analyzing and

pointing to specific examples of sexuality in each of Shinji's relationships underscores the inconsistencies in Netflix's translation of the series as well as the consequences of it.

Shinji & Misato

The first relationship we are introduced to in *Evangelion* is Shinji and Misato's. It's important to note the age gap between Shinji and Misato, with Shinji being 14 and Misato being 29 during the show and *The End of Evangelion*. After becoming an Evangelion pilot, Misato takes on a caretaker role while the two live together. Misato has two identities: one that is cool, carefree, and sexually liberated, and another one that is deeply lonely, depressed, and insecure. She grew up with a father who was constantly working and a mother who would cry in his absence. When she was thirteen, she went with her father and his team to conduct research in Antarctica. During this, the Second Impact occurred leaving Misato as the only one on the team to survive. This left her with horrific trauma, causing her to remain mute for years. A few years after the Second Impact, Misato would attend university where she would meet Ritsuko Akagi and Ryōji Kaji, the two people she is closest with. For Misato and Kaji, this would be the beginning of an on-again-off-again relationship. The three would be reunited after Misato is transferred to Japan to work at NERV, which is where both Ritsuko and Kaji work as well. As part of her work, Misato agrees to take in Shinji and act as his guardian. Misato engages in casual relationships while Shinji attempts to avoid forming any relationships. Despite these very different actions, they both stem from Shinji and Misato's individual fears of being hurt by someone else. As Shinji hides from the people around him, Misato almost does the opposite. However, the two, and their relationship with each other, are crucial to *Evangelion*'s narrative. On the subject of Shinji and Misato in his statement before *Evangelion*'s release, Anno wrote, "Both are extremely afraid of being hurt. Both are unsuitable–lacking the positive attitude–for

what people call heroes of an adventure. But in any case, they are the heroes of this story" (Anno 230). Their opposite reactions to intimacy are ultimately what draw Shinji and Misato together as she pushes towards him in an attempt to get him to embrace relationships.

Just minutes into the first episode of *Evangelion*, we see Shinji's introduction to Misato: a picture of herself that she sent to him with the message, "To Shinji-kun I'll be picking you up, so wait for me, okay?" (see fig. 2). She also draws an arrow pointed at her breasts, stating, "Check this out!!" ("Angel Attack" 2:52). In the following episode Misato declares to Ritsuko, "Don't worry, I won't mess around with some kid" in relation to Shinji ("The Beast" 9:30). A few minutes later, a scene begins where Shinji runs out of the shower due to being scared by Misato's pet hiding in the bathroom. He runs to Misato fully naked which she is unfazed by. The moment is played for laughs, but it is one of the first of many moments between them that are both perverse and normalized. In episode three, Ritsuko asks Misato how things are going with her boyfriend. Confused, Misato replies, "Boyfriend? Oh, you mean Shinji" ("A Transfer" 4:24). Episode 25 of the series is broken up into several sections. It portrays different "cases" for each character's existence. During Misato's case, she must grapple with the reason for her existence, becoming more and more upset about the woman she became because of her trauma. When the episode focuses on Misato's case, she imagines Shinji watching her have sex with Kaji. She's disgusted by the idea of it, but another version of her that represents her self-loathing begins to antagonize her. The alternate Misato says, "You were fine with it in front of the man you loved. In fact, you loved parading around off like this." Misato denies this, but the alternate Misato merely states, "The truth is, you actually love letting Shinji see you like this" ("Do you love me?" 13:14). While she doesn't genuinely enjoy Shinji watching her with Kaji, the way she interacts with men has caused these intrusive thoughts to manifest themselves.

Fig. 2. A picture of Misato Katsuragi with a message to Shinji Ikari left on it. "Angel Attack", *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995.

One of the most infamous scenes between the two is one in *The End of Evangelion*. Shinji struggles with intense depression during the aftermath of Kaworu's death, leading him to become a shell of his past self. Misato realizes that Gendo actually wants to cause a Third Impact in order to be reunited with Shinji's dead mother, Yui. She implores Shinji to pilot his Evangelion for a final time to destroy it and prevent the Third Impact. When he refuses because he fears hurting another person, she gives him a kiss. She then tells him, "That's how grown-ups kiss. There's more in store when you get back" (*The End of Evangelion* 33:00). Immediately after Shinji leaves, Misato dies from a gunshot wound, ending their relationship. In the *Rebuild* films, Misato lives for much longer. Her relationship with Shinji is much different than the one she had with him in previous versions, with her instead acting cold towards him.

Aspects of Shinji and Misato's relationship range from suspicious to unsettling. It is not accurate to claim that Misato is attracted to Shinji, as this is neither implied nor stated. Instead, she interacts with him in the only way she knows: through intimacy. Misato is aware that she

uses sex to make herself feel better and to avoid confronting the trauma caused by the Second Impact, but she represses this realization. In a drunken state in episode 15, she confesses to Kaji, "I'm a conniving bitch who only asks men for help when it's convenient for her!" ("Those women longed for the touch of others' lips, and thus invited their kisses" 17:00). Her use of sexuality is not liberating; it is a defense mechanism to protect herself from emotional pain. Savoy describes this dynamic in her article "Artificial Restoration of Agency through Sex and Technology in Neon Genesis Evangelion," writing:

> …She begins a staggering, introspective, and noncommittal journey into understanding her own wants as well as her rooted opinions of men from her childhood. Sexuality, even moreso than the act of sex, being forced upon a character is a strong theme in *Evangelion*; as Shinji struggles with the idea of sex and the women in his life, Misato has to ward off the inappropriate advances and harassments that make her confront what she really needs out of life and her personal relationships. (Savoy)

While Misato harbors no ulterior motives in her interactions with Shinji, their 15-year age gap still makes these scenes inappropriate. Nevertheless, their relationship is crucial to the narrative, as it delves into trauma responses while also juxtaposing Shinji's characterization. Although I do not condone Misato's actions, they are instrumental in understanding both her and Shinji's characters.

Shinji & Asuka

Similarly, Asuka only pursues a relationship with Shinji because she wants attention as a result of her trauma, not because she is attracted to Shinji. Asuka makes her debut in episode eight of the series as an Evangelion pilot, characterized by her assertive and confrontational demeanor. Throughout subsequent episodes, Asuka consistently antagonizes Shinji, yet their

relationship is often characterized by acts of intimacy. Despite stark personality differences, both characters grapple with similar internal struggles. Asuka's tumultuous upbringing is marked by a tragic incident involving her mother and an Evangelion, which caused her mother's mental collapse and subsequent suicide, events that deeply scarred Asuka. Consequently, Asuka adopts a self-centered persona, driven by a relentless pursuit of external validation to compensate for the void left by her mother's tragic fate. Similarly, Shinji confronts the loss of his mother and the emotional absence of his father, Gendo. These circumstances compel Shinji to seek affirmation and acknowledgment, particularly from his elusive father figure. Thus, both Asuka and Shinji manifest behaviors aimed at fulfilling unmet emotional needs, underscoring their parallel struggles with parental loss and approval-seeking tendencies.

Shortly after Asuka's introduction, she and Shinji are forced to fight an Angel together. They have to quickly change into their plugsuits, which help them better stay in sync with their Evangelion. Asuka yells at Shinji not to peek at her changing, but he still glances over at her as she does ("Asuka Strikes!" 10:31). While it is only a minor instance of intimacy between the two, it would be one many as the series progresses. The following episode, the two are alone in Misato's apartment due to her working late. Asuka initially sleeps in Misato's room, but she lays next to Shinji in the middle of the night. She pretends to fall asleep immediately, and Shinji tries to kiss her ("Both of You, Dance Like You Want to Win!" 16:44). It's unclear if Asuka is actually asleep or not as she starts to call out for her mom before Shinji can continue, but she later yells at him for trying to in the first place. Asuka's antagonization towards Shinji occasionally manifests through her teasing him sexually. In episode 10 of the series, Shinji is trying to study when Asuka approaches him in a bikini. She has her breasts close to his face, grabbing his attention as he makes no attempt to hide it. As he stares, she asks him if heat would make her breasts grow

("Magmadiver" 6:14). After this, their relationship primarily consists of Asuka teasing Shinji without becoming physical again until episode 15. The two are alone again in the apartment when Asuka asks Shinji if he wants to kiss because she's bored. Shinji hesitates, and Asuka bullies him over it, asking if he thinks his mother is watching them right now. The two kiss until Shinji needs to stop and breathe, but this ruins the moment, causing Asuka to run away in disgust ("Those women longed for the touch of others' lips, and thus invited their kisses" 17:50). These moments of intimacy are often instigated by Asuka, but this would be the opposite case in a scene between them in *The End of Evangelion*. The film begins with Asuka in a comatose state in the hospital. Shinji begs her for help as he tries to shake her awake. In doing so, he accidentally exposes her breasts. He masturbates over her body before admitting to himself, "I'm the lowest of the low" (*The End of Evangelion* 3:50)[4]. The scene is a horrifying and tragic beginning to the highly anticipated film, and is used to emphasize Shinji's self hatred as he sinks deeper into his depression.

Like Misato, Asuka isn't actually attracted to Shinji. Instead, she teases him because she wants attention. Because Shinji doesn't give her this, she grows resentment towards him. We can see this with her relationship with Kaji as well. Asuka is constantly trying to get Kaji's attention, leading her to become jealous of Misato and even Shinji when they get his approval. In episode 22 of *Evangelion*, Asuka and Kaji are alone when she tries to flirt with him. In response he says, "When we get to Japan, I'm sure there will be lots of new boyfriends waiting for you" ("Don't Be" 00:30). Asuka immediately jumps on top of him, telling him that she is willing to kiss him or even do more. Gibbs describes Asuka's reasoning behind her relationships with Kaji and Shinji in her PhD thesis *Breaking Binaries: Transgressing Sexualities in Japanese Animation*. She

[4] This scene has also been criticized for its retranslation. The original release of the film had Shinji state, "I'm so fucked up." The Netflix version adjusted this to "I'm the lowest of the low."

writes, “Her attraction first to Misato’s past lover, Kaji, and then to Shinji, result from her primal need to seek out a dominant and assertive male to be her defender, because she unconsciously understands that she herself is emotionally fragile” (Gibbs 101). Her attempts at getting attention from men is a way for her to cope with the emotional trauma left behind from her childhood.

Shinji & Rei

In contrast, Shinji’s relationship with Rei differs from the ones described above due to the fact she is more of a motherly figure, but it is still crucial to understanding Shinji’s character. She is not a human, and instead is a clone created by Gendo using remnants of Yui as well as an Angel. Rei appears to be a 14-year-old girl, but she is one of many clones meant to replace Yui in Gendo’s life. Shinji initially has no idea that Rei is his mother, and doesn’t understand why Gendo prefers her. Rei serves as a foil of Asuka, as she’s introverted and indifferent to everything, including herself. She doesn’t seem to believe her life has any value, and she merely obeys Gendo for the majority of the series. It’s only because of how close she becomes with Shinji over the course of the show that she eventually decides to betray Gendo and end her obedience to him. Despite this, there is no attraction between Shinji and Rei whatsoever. The two obviously care about each other, but there appears to be nothing more to their relationship. Gibbs notes this in her thesis as well. She states, “...although Rei does not appear to be concerned with Shinji’s wellbeing for much of the series, she does feel inexplicably drawn to and eventually protective of him” (Gibbs 90). In one instance, Shinji even notes how motherly Rei is (“Those women longed for the touch of others' lips, and thus invited their kisses” 6:36). However, there is one sexually charged scene between the two of them. In episode 5, Shinji enters Rei’s room to find it empty. He is distracted after he notices his father’s glasses in her room and grabs them. When Rei returns she is only in a towel and she is quick to take the glasses from Shinji, causing

him to fall on top of her. Her towel comes off and Shinji remains on top of her. She nonchalantly asks him to get off of her, and it is only then that he realizes he had been grabbing her breast ("Rei I" 15:14). Rei is notably indifferent about this interaction, but Shinji is embarrassed by what he did. While their relationship isn't inherently sexual, and Rei represents his mother, their relationship still includes a moment of sexual intimacy.

It's important to note how unsettling Rei's relationship with Gendo is. As previously mentioned, she is a series of clones of Yui created by Gendo in an attempt to grapple with the death of his wife. He serves as her legal guardian, and we see a flashback of him beginning to raise her when she's a young child. Rei somehow represents both Gendo's wife and child at the same time. She sees her only purpose is to pilot her Evangelion because Gendo asks her to; Gendo just sees her as a way to replace his wife. Browning and Veit write on the meaning of Rei's life, "At Asuka's goading, she even admits that she would give up her life if ordered to by Commander Ikari. It's through piloting her EVA that Rei feels connected to the world, as though she has some worth. It's all she has" (Browning and Vei 4). Rei lacks connection due to the fact she is merely a clone, and serving Gendo as a means of gaining his approval is her primary way of seeking connection. However, as previously mentioned, the care she has for Shinji eventually becomes stronger than the one she has for Gendo.

Shinji & Mari

Shinji's relationship with Mari Makinami is only briefly shown, and primarily sexually charged, as she is not a part of the initial *Evangelion* show. Instead, she's first introduced in the second *Rebuild* film, *Evangelion: 2.22 You Can (Not) Advance*[5]. However, Mari is the only one

[5] The original title for the film is *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance*. The adjusted version, which is the one featured on Amazon Prime Video, is *Evangelion: 2.22*.

who ends up in a relationship with Shinji. It's important to note again that the *Rebuild* films were not translated by Netflix, but instead Amazon Prime Video. However, the same translator, Dan Kanemitsu, was used for the films. She's the pilot for the fifth Evangelion, which she loves doing and seems to have a lot of fun with, unlike the rest of the pilots. The Japanese voice actress for Mari, Maaya Sakamoto, described her character as "fundamentally an optimist" in a pamphlet released before the final *Rebuild* film. She went on to say, "She may have her own worries, but she's not the type to show them, and she always seems to be having fun. I think that's what makes her such a contrast to Shinji and the other characters" (Sakamoto). It's unclear how old Mari is as it's never stated anywhere in the films. In *Evangelion: 3.0+1.01*, an image is shown of Yui holding a young Shinji and someone who looks like Mari in frame (see fig. 3). It is implied that Yui and Mari attended university together. Some important context to identifying Mari's age is in the *Evangelion* manga. In a bonus chapter in the final volume of the manga, Yui and Mari are attending university together. This is when Yui and Gendo begin their relationship, causing Mari to admit to Yui that she has romantic feelings for her, but that she hopes she's happy. In comparison, Shinji is 14 in the first two *Rebuild* films. In the final two, fifteen years have passed, but each Evangelion pilot remains physically unaged due to something referred to as "the curse of the Evas."

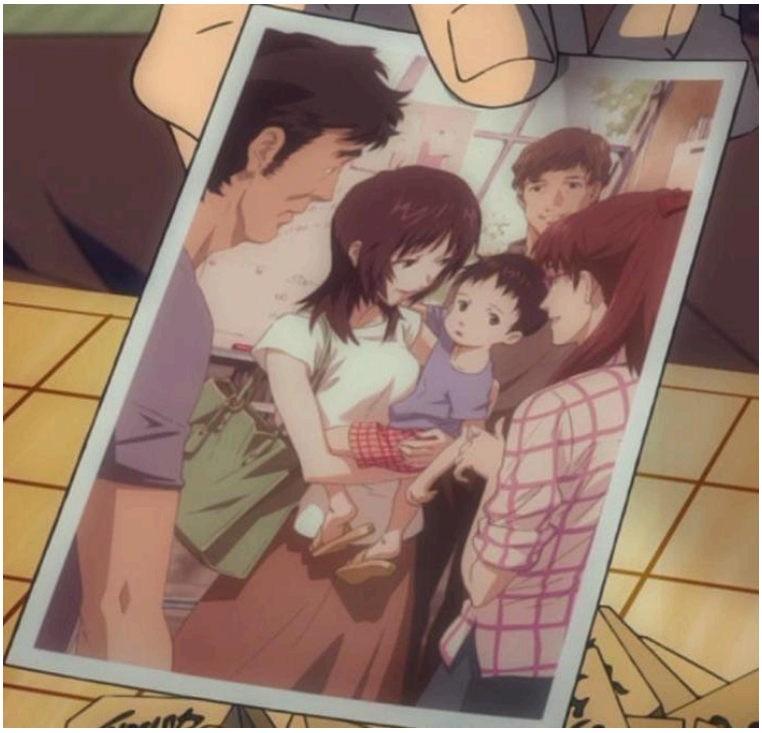

Fig. 3. A picture of Yui and someone who looks similar to Mari. *Evangelion: 3.0+1.01*, 2021.

In Mari's first introduction with Shinji in *Evangelion 2.22*, Mari falls on top of him, causing his face to be pressed in between her breasts (*Evangelion 2.22* 47:13). However, they weren't formally introduced until *Evangelion: 3.0+1.01 Thrice Upon a Time*, the final *Rebuild* film. Mari introduces herself for the first time before smelling Shinji and declaring he smells "more grown up" (*Evangelion: 3.0+1.01* 1:09:04). Mari's primary characteristic is how often she mentions her breasts, which she does over the course of the films, eventually even being mentioned in the final scene of the *Evangelion* franchise. By the end of the film, the pilots no longer need their Evangelions due to Angels no longer being a threat. The final scene of the film features Shinji's normal life. Shinji is waiting at a train station alone when someone covers his eyes behind him asking him to guess who's there. Shinji responds, "A gorgeous gal with big boobs" (*Evangelion: 3.0+1.01* 2:24:09). Mari reveals herself, before sniffing him and stating he has "the scent of an adult" (*Evangelion: 3.0+1.01* 2:24:21). Shinji tells her that she looks cute,

and the two take each other's hands and run away together. Notably, the scene briefly features Rei and Kaworu standing together. It's unclear what their relationship to each other is, but the choice to end the franchise with Kaworu and Shinji with women as opposed to each other (after Kaworu was the only one to show Shinji actual love) is an odd choice.

Shinji & Kaworu

In contrast, Shinji's relationship with Kaworu is moreso characterized by romance as opposed to sexuality. Kaworu Nagisa appears fleetingly in a singular episode of the *Evangelion* series; however, his impact on the narrative is unparalleled. He is the first one to show genuine love and approval for Shinji, something he has craved his whole life. He is characterized by his sincere and empathetic demeanor towards those around him. Initially shrouded in mystery, Misato harbors suspicions about Kaworu's true identity. Episode 24 marks a pivotal moment when Kaworu is assigned to temporarily replace the incapacitated Asuka as an Evangelion pilot, leading to his encounter with Shinji. From their initial interactions, Kaworu's mannerisms leave Shinji visibly flustered and nervous, a stark departure from Shinji's usual demeanor around male peers such as Tōji Suzuhara. This contrasts with Shinji's reaction to Kaji's misinterpreted invitation for a date in episode 17 as well, where he simply responds, "But I'm a guy" ("Fourth Child" 16:03). Prior to this encounter, Shinji had only exhibited such responses like the ones he has with Kaworu in interactions with women and girls in his life.

After their initial introduction, Kaworu asks Shinji if he can join him in the showers. Shinji hesitates, prompting Kaworu to inquire, "You don't want me to come?" ("The Beginning and the End" 8:45). Eventually, Shinji reluctantly invites him, and the scene transitions to them bathing together. During their conversation, Kaworu philosophizes on humanity's perpetual sense of loneliness and briefly holds Shinji's hand before standing to leave. When Shinji

suggests they should go to bed, Kaworu asks if they should do so together, a proposal Shinji promptly declines. In the final moments of this encounter, Kaworu declares, "You're worthy of my affection."[6] Shinji, taken aback, asks for clarification, to which Kaworu responds, "It means I like you" ("The Beginning and the End" 10:08). The scene quickly transitions to the title screen after that.

In the next scene, Kaworu lays in bed while Shinji is on the floor. Here, Shinji admits that he was the one who asked to stay overnight with Kaworu. As their conversation continues, Kaworu remarks, "You know, I might have been born so that I could meet you" ("The Beginning and the End" 12:35). This marks the culmination of their positive interactions as it is later revealed that Kaworu is not human but an Angel. To save humanity from the impending Third Impact, Shinji is faced with the grim task of killing Kaworu. Horrified by this revelation of Kaworu's true nature, Shinji exclaims, "You betrayed me! You betrayed my feelings!" Despite this, Kaworu encourages Shinji to kill him, believing it to be a necessary sacrifice for humanity's survival. He expresses happiness at having met Shinji. In one of the series' most heart-wrenching moments, Shinji holds Kaworu in the hands of his Evangelion, agonizing over whether to crush and kill him (see fig. 4). Ultimately, Shinji makes the devastating decision to end Kaworu's life, and viewers witness Kaworu's severed head falling away. Reflecting on their short-lived relationship, Shinji later says:

> Kaworu said I was…worthy of his grace. That he liked me. That's the first time anybody's ever said they liked me. Ever. He was similar to me. And Ayanami. I really liked him. If only one of us could survive, it should have been him. He was a way better person than I am. Kaworu should have survived! ("The Beginning and the End" 23:30)

[6] Both the dubbed version and subtitled versions of this episode were significantly altered on Netflix. In the dubbed version, Kaworu instead says, "Yes, you're worthy of my grace" before saying it means he likes Shinji.

Until this episode, Shinji had never experienced such genuine kindness from anyone. His usual tendency to shield himself from emotional harm had briefly subsided, and his relationship with Kaworu stood out as a singular instance in his life. Unlike Shinji's other relationships, which often involved sexual intimacy with women, his connection with Kaworu centered purely on mutual affection and understanding.

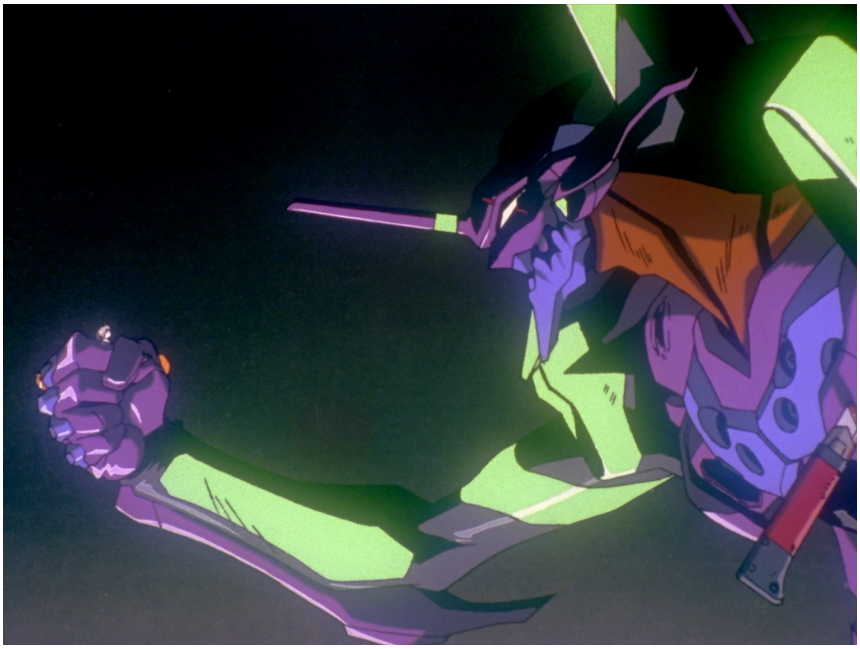

Fig. 4. Shinji's Evangelion holding Kaworu. "The Beginning and the End", *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1996.

(Mis)Translation

The societal impact on heterosexuality being promoted as the norm, just as the Netflix translation of *Evangelion* did, has been noted by scholars and queer theorists extensively. As previously mentioned, Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" is centered around how heterosexuality is being pushed as what's natural, causing women to believe that they have to be with men. She is specifically concerned with "how and why women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, coworkers, lovers,

community has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise" (Rich 13). The erasure of lesbian relationships promotes the idea that heterosexual ones are the only kind of relationships that should be shared. Women are led to believe that they must engage in relationships with men through "compulsion" in their everyday lives. She writes:

> Women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable—even if unsatisfying or oppressive—components of their lives. The chastity belt; child marriage; erasure of lesbian existence (except as exotic and perverse) in art, literature, film; idealization of heterosexual romance and marriage—these are some fairly obvious forms of compulsion. (Rich 13)

Because of these compulsions, queer women end up believing that being with men is the only way to live. Despite Rich's work being specific to the lesbian experience, compulsory heterosexuality can affect any queer person as well. In the *Journal of Adolescence*, researchers Paul Flowers and Katie Buston wrote, "Homosexuality, and homoerotic desires, are understood as both dubious and requiring punishment…This formulation is accepted to the point that it is often not stated but is simply an underlying given, unspoken in institutions such as education, the law and the family" (Flowers and Buston 51). It's impossible to say that Kanemitsu's translation of *Evangelion* is intentionally homophobic, but the removal of queer subtext between Shinji and Kaworu does promote the homophobic mindset that queer identity is one that should be hidden from the public view. Adding the context of how sexually charged and normalized Shinji's relationships are with women in the franchise, Netflix's version of *Evangelion* has participated in a problematic phenomenon where heterosexuality, no matter how perverse, is more acceptable than any representation of queerness.

The Netflix version of Shinji and Kaworu's relationship is not inherently romantic, which is why fans were outraged by Kanemitsu's choice to change Kaworu's profession of his feelings from "It means I love you" to "It means I like you." "Love" and "like" are not synonymous with each other, and to make Kaworu say he likes Shinji alters the original meaning of his confession. In addition to this, the show's initial English version from Gainax had Shinji admit that he loved Kaworu as well. As previously mentioned, Kanemitsu has defended his translation due to the fact it was making their relationship "exciting" because he left it open to interpretation (@dankanemitsu). However, if this was his legitimate reason for altering the weight of their relationship, fans had already believed that the two admitting they loved each other had already left their relationship up to interpretation. In 2005, one forum post on EvaGeeks.org asked, "Is Kaworu gay?" Hundreds of people weighed in on the question, debating whether Kaworu (and occasionally Shinji) was gay. In an interview with Vox, Narelle Bailey, an anime localization editor, touched on this very subject. She said, "'I love you' is already ambiguous enough in the context of this show. There's a reason people have found ways to argue against the nature of this relationship and its feelings for 20 years" (Romano). There was already debate on the relationship, and therefore it was already up to interpretation. There is no version of Shinji and Kaworu's story in which they are explicitly dating or label themselves as queer. Instead, most fans have chosen to read between the lines of episode 24 and interpret their relationship as romantic. Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto explains this, and how fans have responded to the relationship, in her article "Yaoi Fanworks as Audience Response to Kaworu and Shinji's Relationship." She writes, "The series itself, and in particular some works in the rest of the franchise, do suggest that there is more to the Kawoshin relationship than mere admiration, friendship, platonic love and finally betrayal and enmity. And this is what activates fannish

imagination" (Bauwens-Sugimoto 330). In other words, the Gainax version of this episode already left the relationship up to interpretation. Kanemitsu's word choice changes actually removes queer subtext from the relationship and instead portrays it as more platonic than anything in comparison.

The Gainax version of the series leaves Shinji and Kaworu's relationship open to interpretation, but it's important to note the reasoning behind why fans believed it to be romantic in the first place. As described above, Shinji often responds to Kaworu with a flustered and nervous demeanor, something he previously only did with women. While I am not analyzing the manga, it does feature context in which their relationship is far less subtextual. The two actually kiss each other in the manga, but once again, they never state that they are queer or dating. As society has become more progressive towards queer relationships, and therefore critical analysis on queer subtext, more and more fans have decided that their admissions of love are romantic. They never have to explicitly identify themselves or their relationship as queer; their subtly romantic interactions are enough for many fans to agree today that they're queer.

To understand how Kanemitsu's mistranslation even occurred, it's important to first understand the translation process for anime itself. The process of translating literature can vary, but anime translators can learn from the processes of translating literary works because their goals are ultimately the same. One theorist writes, "The main goal in functional translating should be to transmit communicative tasks of the text. It means that a fictional (literary) work, translated to a recipient's language, should affect the reader (or spectator) in the same way as the original text" (Rumak 436). In both the translation of literature and anime, maintaining the feeling the audience is left with after viewing is essential to the translation process. By changing Kaworu's admission of love into one in which he merely admits Shinji is worthy of his grace and

affection, Kanemitsu has failed what Rumak referred to as the "main goal" of a functional translation. Compared to Gainax's original translation, the feelings between the two are no longer read the same way.

Despite the importance of maintaining the initial emotions tied to anime in Japanese to retain the queer-affirming narrative, it is a noted phenomenon that translators have altered or removed and censored significant moments in anime as a form of censorship or to promote a specific ideology. Researcher Daniel Josephy-Hernández writes, "Television programmes (this of course includes anime) are encoded with a meaning that is then decoded by the audience; this meaning then incites specific social practices that benefit a dominant ideology…This is the heteronormative message ultimately encoded in most anime" (Josephy-Hernández 316). While Josephy-Hernández is referring to pre-existing, heteronormative subjects, this can still be applied to *Evangelion*. The mistranslation of the relationship between Shinji and Kaworu alters the original meaning of their relationship, but also alters what kind of ideology the show is promoting. What was originally a form of representation of two young, queer boys expressing their love is now a means of queer erasure and heteronormativity.

The translation process is one that has been described as a political one. There are numerous examples of queer identity being removed from anime during English translation, like *Evangelion* and *Sailor Moon*. These choices are inherently political, as described by Julie McDonough Dolmaya in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics*. It's important to mention that the translation process often encapsulates the localization process as well. Dolmaya describes the localization process as "the process of modifying digital content for various cultural and linguistic groups, and the product of these processes" (Dolmaya 343). English translators are not only trying to adapt a piece of text into English but also ensure that the

references, actions, word choice, etc. make sense to the audience as well. One of the most well known examples of localization is from the *Pokémon: Indigo League* anime series. A character was shown holding onigiri, but the character refers to it as a jelly donut ("Primeape Goes Bananas" 3:35). This was done due to translators believing that an American audience is unfamiliar with onigiri. While this is a frivolous example, translators like Kanemitsu hold a lot of power that can be taken advantage of. As explained by Dolmaya, "...translators and localizers act as gatekeepers who shape and control the transnational circulation of images and stories" (Dolmaya 347). Translators are given an important task of making media accessible, but this often leads to censorship in the name of making it more acceptable. Dolmaya explains that localization allows for the removal of culturally insensitive references like a nuclear bomb test being removed from Japanese versions of *Fallout 3*, but it has also been used to remove subjects like transgender characters in North America and present them as cisgender (Dolmaya 348). There is a lot of risk involved with the translation process due to how it can be used as a way to promote one's biases.

In fact, Kanemitsu's interpretation of Shinji and Kaworu is not the only time he has come under fire for what some believe to be an attempt at pushing certain ideologies or biases. In a scene in Netflix's *The End of Evangelion*, Shinji passionately tells Asuka, "I want to do anything I can for you. I want us to be together forever! Please, you're the only one for me Asuka!" (*The End of Evangelion* 1:03:56). However, the original version was much less romantic. Instead, Shinji says, "I want to help you, Asuka, and I want to stay with you. You're the only one that can help me!" (*The End of Evangelion* 1:03:56). By altering Shinji and Kaworu's relationship to be more platonic, and Shinji and Asuka's as more romantic, Kanemitsu has clearly input his own

bias on *Evangelion* relationships in his public work. Jennifer O'Donnell, a Japanese-English media translator herself, described this in an article for her website. She writes:

> Dan Kanemitsu's translation highly likely has biases in it. I don't know if these are conscious or not but he clearly made translation choices which may have been shaped by his biases. For example, when taking into consideration the queer erasure that many people are upset about, as well as Shinji and Asuka's interactions, the translation choices implies a bias towards Shinji/Asuka. (O'Donnell)

Someone viewing the Gainax version may believe that Shinji and Kaworu love each other and Shinji has no romantic feelings for Asuka. Comparatively, a viewer of the Netflix version may come to the opposite conclusion due to the way Kanemitsu translated the source material. In addition to this, Kanemitsu has been publicly criticized due to how open he is about his stance on censorship in anime and manga when it comes to sexually explicit content featuring minors. He has continuously argued that this content should be allowed, and to ban it would be an infringement on artistic expression. In a 2015 article with the Guardian, Kanemitsu stated, "There is no such thing as manga and anime child pornography…I think many people will see the logic of protecting free speech, as long as no actual people are harmed" (McCurry). He insisted this three years later in another article from BBC where he said, "There is a child being harmed, on the one hand, and then there is a depiction of a child being harmed. There is a big difference between the two" (Varley). Kanemitsu has openly supported what he refers to as freedom of expression and speech, even when it comes to content that some have called pedophilic. While he does not view his own translation of *Evangelion* as censorship, he has inadvertently promoted censorship through it.

In the years following the retranslation of *Evangelion*, there has never been an official answer as to how this happened in the first place. Kanemitsu believes that he created an accurate translation of the franchise, stating that he thinks he kept the show exciting through his translation. On the same day he posted that on X, he also replied to another complaint about the scenes between Shinji and Kaworu. He wrote, "While I am not in a position to refer specifically to the decision involved in the scene you described, in all my translation of any title, I have tried my best to be faithful to the original source material. Bar none" (@dankanemitsu). He has also explained that he has never intentionally promoted queer erasure in his work. In an email to Vox writer Aja Romano he wrote, "It is not my intention to marginalize queer relations in media, as I have fought hard to ensure free speech should cover queer relations in manga and this material should be made available to the largest audience possible" (Romano). While Kanemitsu hasn't described how his translation came to be, it is clear that he believes it is a fair translation and has openly stated he had no ulterior motives. Despite this, the translation still has created consequences for its audience.

The comparison between Shinji's relationships is jarring, specifically to his relationship with Kaworu and his heterosexual relationships. The series took its opportunity to subvert the norm that is queerness being portrayed as perverse and instead crafted a narrative where it is the only relationship that is innocent and focuses on emotions instead of sexuality. Kanemitsu presumably has a bias towards Shinji and Asuka's relationship, as shown by his choice to make the relationship more romantic. His changes have removed important queer representation, which was only worsened by the fact that heterosexual relationships have largely remained unaltered (except with Shinji and Asuka's relationship becoming more romantic). These choices

fall in line with the longstanding phenomenon of translators removing queerness from animated stories as a means of promoting heterosexuality as the norm.

Conclusion

By shifting the portrayal of Shinji and Kaworu's relationship from one that subtly suggests queerness to a more platonic dynamic, Netflix's adaptation of *Evangelion* may inadvertently suggest that queer identities should remain concealed. Even if viewers are unfamiliar with the original nuances of their interaction, there are significant consequences as they will now miss out on a form of queer representation that was already established by fans. *Evangelion* originally challenged stereotypes by presenting queerness as a natural aspect rather than something perverse, opting to depict heterosexuality in a similar manner. The show's representation has the potential to impact queer individuals, including young men, despite never explicitly labeling their relationship as such. Dan Kanemitsu, and by extension Netflix, have removed this subtextual layer, thereby limiting potential interpretations and representations that could have arisen from it.

We must continue to raise awareness about mistranslations like the one involving Shinji and Kaworu's relationship. The complete context of their relationship is crucial to the narrative and warrants further research. My focus has primarily been on the *Evangelion* series and its subsequent films, but the manga provides a wealth of additional material to explore. While I have referenced it, there is much more to discuss regarding its standalone significance within the *Evangelion* franchise. Additionally, the separate manga series *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Angelic Days* presents the narrative as a romantic comedy in an alternate universe. Here, Kaworu harbors romantic feelings for Shinji, although their relationship does not culminate romantically. Kaworu appears repeatedly across various media within the franchise, yet none allow him to express

these feelings with a positive resolution. Other researchers can further analyze these relationships, particularly in the manga, and delve deeper into my findings. Furthermore, I have only touched upon examples of complex sexual themes within the series. There is a recurring motif of intertwined relationships throughout the franchise (ex. Misato's attraction to Kaji due to his similarity to her father, Gendo's use of Rei as a replacement for Yui, Ritsuko and her mother's intimate connections with Gendo, etc.). Undoubtedly, there is extensive research potential in exploring sexuality across the entirety of the franchise. My exploration of perverse heterosexuality in *Evangelion* is by no means exhaustive; rather, it serves as a preliminary investigation. Few have previously initiated discussions on mistranslations and sexuality within *Evangelion*, and I hope this capstone can catalyze further academic dialogue on these topics.

Netflix's rendition of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *The End of Evangelion*, alongside Amazon's adaptation of the *Rebuild* films, are the primary and most accessible way to watch the franchise today. However, I do not regard Kanemitsu's work as a faithful translation, which consequently hampers viewers' ability to grasp the complete narrative context originally intended by Gainax. One aspect I have yet to explore is the phenomenon of fan translations, where fans produce their own interpretations of media due to dissatisfaction with official versions. Examining how fan translators have approached Shinji and Kaworu's relationship could offer valuable insights into differing interpretations and cultural receptions. Furthermore, investigating the linguistic choices in translations of the franchise into different languages could also prove significant. Different diction and cultural nuances in these translations may shape how international audiences perceive and interpret the characters and themes in *Evangelion* compared to what translators thought it should be perceived. The discussion I have initiated regarding the

translation and localization of *Evangelion* can certainly be expanded to encompass these diverse linguistic contexts.

As I have extensively documented, Shinji's interactions with women often involve sexually charged moments. Even when there is a significant age gap or issues around consent, Netflix's adaptation of the Evangelion franchise has largely retained these scenes unaltered. These intimate moments serve to depict how each character responds to the trauma they have endured and aid in the audience's understanding of their personalities. Similarly, Shinji's unique relationship with Kaworu provides insight into Shinji's character and his response to someone attempting to forge a close connection with him. In this brief relationship, we witness something that remains unique within the franchise: genuine love for Shinji. The omission of their admission of love for each other not only erases queer representation but also diminishes the viewing experience for audiences. Kaworu is the only character whom Shinji allows to become emotionally close, and the audience's response to Shinji's trauma following Kaworu's death is undermined because they are unaware of their mutual declarations of love as originally translated by Gainax. The alteration of Shinji and Kaworu's relationship carries not only societal implications but also detracts significantly from the viewing experience for English-speaking audiences. Despite Kaworu's brief appearance, no other character has impacted Shinji in the same profound way. To try and adjust their relationship to one without any queer subtext is simply an attempt to censor what Shinji already established in Gainax's original version: "Kaworu said that he loved me…I loved him" ("The Beginning and the End" 23:32).

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